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Potential workers

Potential labour supply of people who are not working, including wanting to work, availability for work, marginal attachment and job search.

Reference period February 2021

Released 7/07/2021

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Key statistics

In February 2021 there were 20.7 million people in the usually resident civilian population who were 15 years or over, of whom:

- 2.2 million people who were not working and wanted to work, of whom 808,000 were unemployed.
- 1.7 million people who were not working and were available to start work immediately.

Prior to February 2021, information was published in [Participation, Job Search and Mobility, Australia \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-](#)

[job-search-and-mobility-australia/feb-2021](#)). From February 2021, statistics are now published in three topic-based releases - this Potential workers release, as well as:

- [Job mobility \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/job-mobility/feb-2021\)](#)
- [Underemployed workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/underemployed-workers/feb-2021\)](#)

Potential worker, job mobility and underemployment data for 2015 to 2021 are also available in [TableBuilder \(https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6226.0.00.001\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6226.0.00.001). TableBuilder enables the creation of customised tables and graphs.

Potential workers and marginal attachment to the labour force

This release of statistics from the PJSM survey includes a simpler approach for presenting statistics on unused labour supply. The new Potential workers release of PJSM data presents statistics all people who are not employed (i.e. regardless of their classification in the monthly Labour Force Survey as employed or not in the labour force), and the extent to which they may be regarded as "Potential workers" based on their circumstances and activities.

Historically, PJSM content has been presented using the marginal attachment framework and the characteristics of people "not participating in the labour force", based on the criteria used to derive unemployment (i.e. activity and/or availability).

While the new approach to presenting statistics for potential workers differs slightly from the traditional marginal attachment framework, and presents some population groups that do not entirely overlap with some of the marginally attached groups, there is still a strong alignment between them. Also statistics within the traditional marginal attachment framework are still available.

People who want to work

In February 2021, there were 20.7 million people in the usually resident civilian population who were 15 years or over, of whom:

- 13.0 million were employed
- 2.2 million were not employed and wanted to work, of whom 808,000 were classified as

unemployed

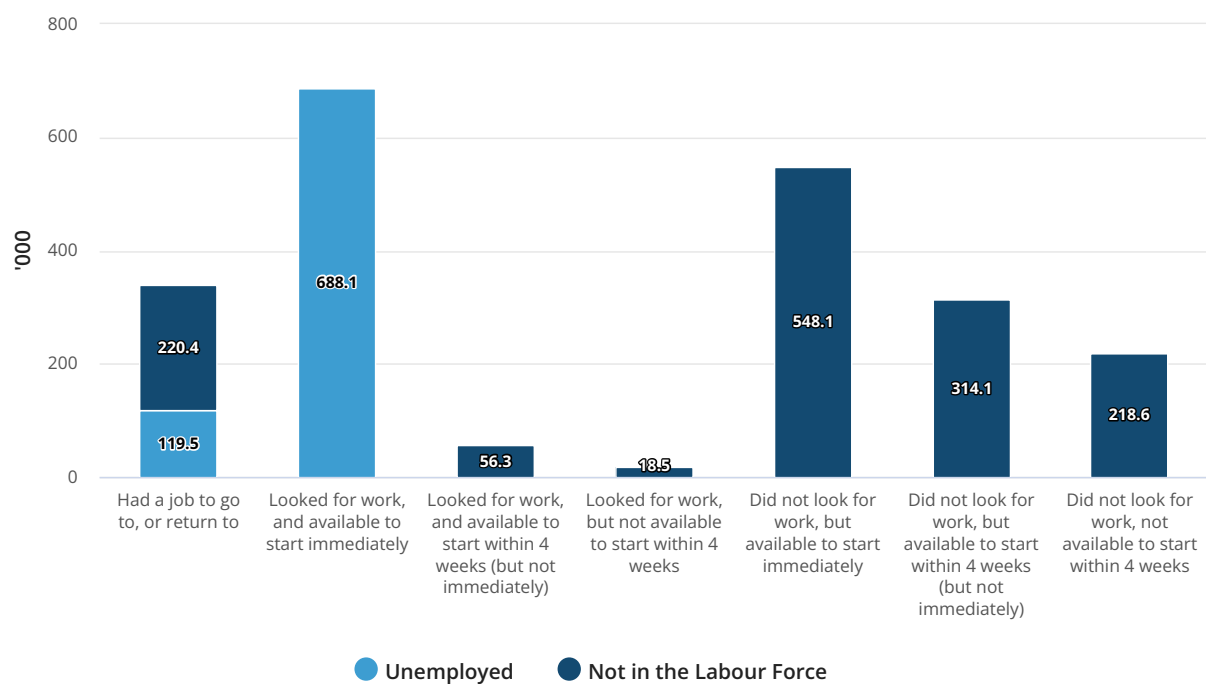
- 5.5 million were not employed and did not want to work

Of the 2.2 million people who wanted to work:

- 882,000 looked for work
- 220,000 had a job to go to, or return to
- 1,081,000 did not look for work

Over three-quarters of those who wanted to work, but did not look for work, were available to start immediately or within 4 weeks.

Chart 1: People who wanted to work, February 2021, Original



Marginal attachment framework

► Image

► Description

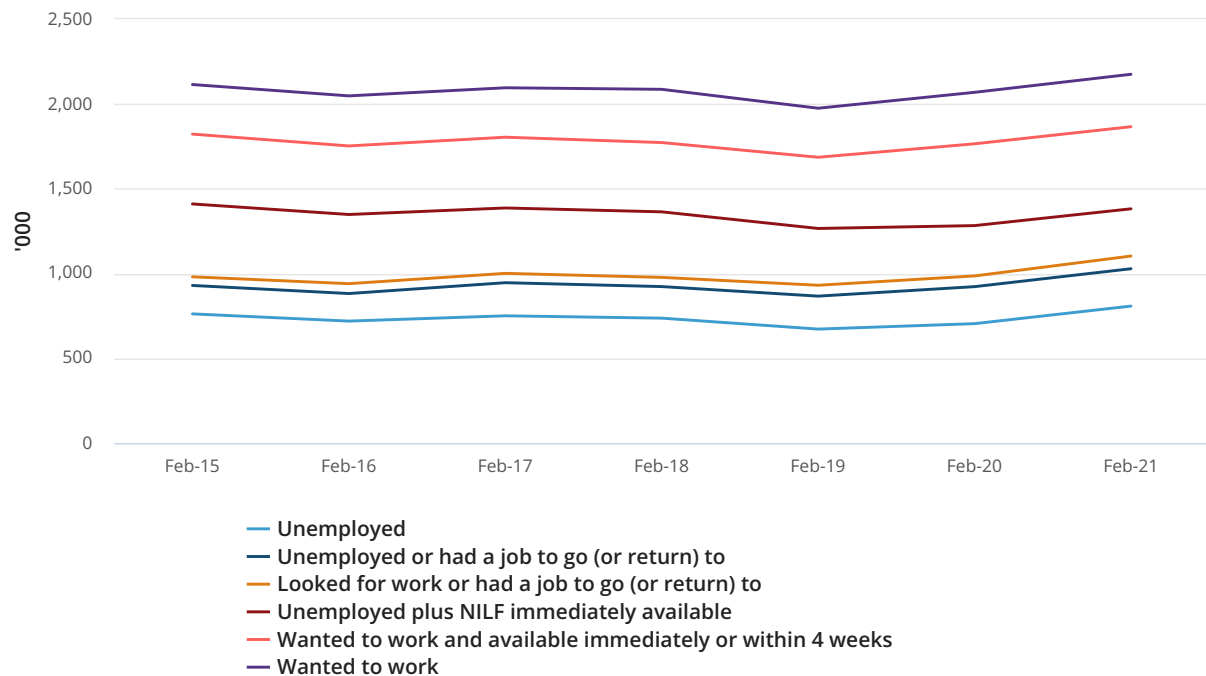
Measures of potential workers

The number of unemployed people is an important measure for monitoring the labour market. Unemployment is necessarily strictly defined to reflect an economic measure of the immediately active and available labour supply, at a specific point in time.

However, there are additional ways to look at the potential workforce - either as potential workers now or potential workers in the short to medium-term. Note that in this context, the potential workforce reflects people within the usually resident population in Australia in February 2021, and does not account for potential workers from other countries (including former or future residents of Australia, who may work in the Australian labour market in the future).

In February 2021, there were 2.2 million people who did not work and wanted to work. This was 14.4% of the 15.1 million people in the 'potential labour force' (i.e. those who were either employed or were a potential worker). Of these, 808,000 were classified as unemployed.

Chart 2: Potential workers, Original

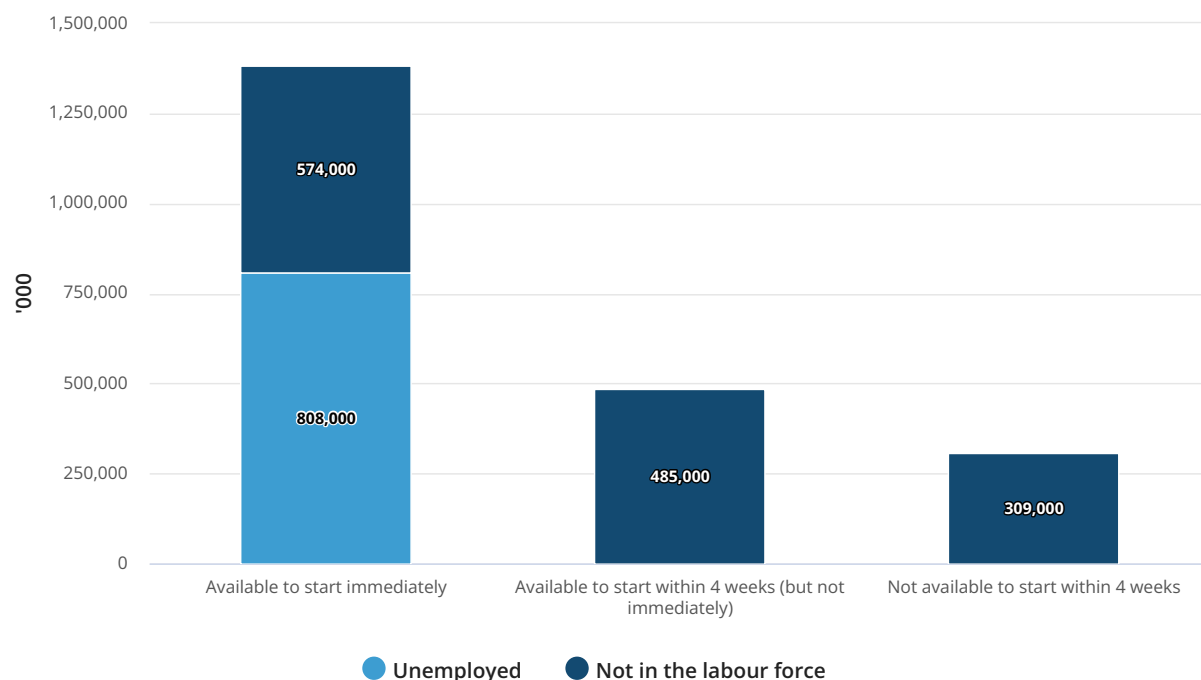


Availability for work

Not everyone who wants to work is available to work. Of the 2.2 million people in February 2021 who wanted to work:

- 1.38 million were available to start work immediately
- 485,000 were available to start work within 4 weeks (but not immediately)
- 309,000 were not available to start work within 4 weeks

Chart 3: People who wanted to work, Availability for work



People who are not going to be available for work in the short to medium-term may not begin looking for work until closer to when they will be able to work. Of those who were not available within 4 weeks:

- 49,700 looked for work
- 259,600 did not look

There were many reasons why people were not available to work. The main reasons reported by people who wanted to work but were not available to work within 4 weeks were:

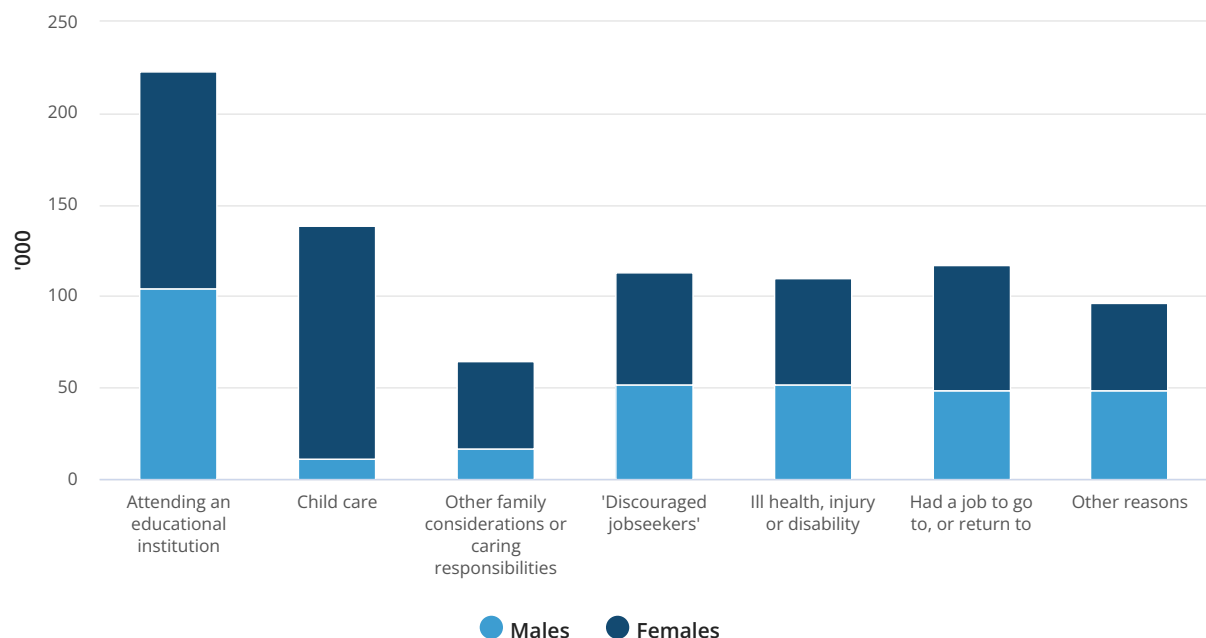
- Caring for children – 73,000 (24% of those who were not available within 4 weeks)
- Studying, or returning to studies – 58,000 (19%)
- Own long-term health condition or disability – 52,000 (17%)
- Own short-term health condition or injury – 26,000 (8%)
- Caring for ill or elderly person/relative – 25,000 (8%)

Not looking for work

There were 862,200 people who wanted to work, were available to start either immediately or within 4 weeks, but did not actively look for work. The main reasons they did not actively look for work were:

- Attending an educational institution – 222,900
- Child care – 138,700
- they were 'Discouraged job seekers' – 113,000

Chart 4: Main reason not looking for work, People who were available to start work immediately or within 4 weeks



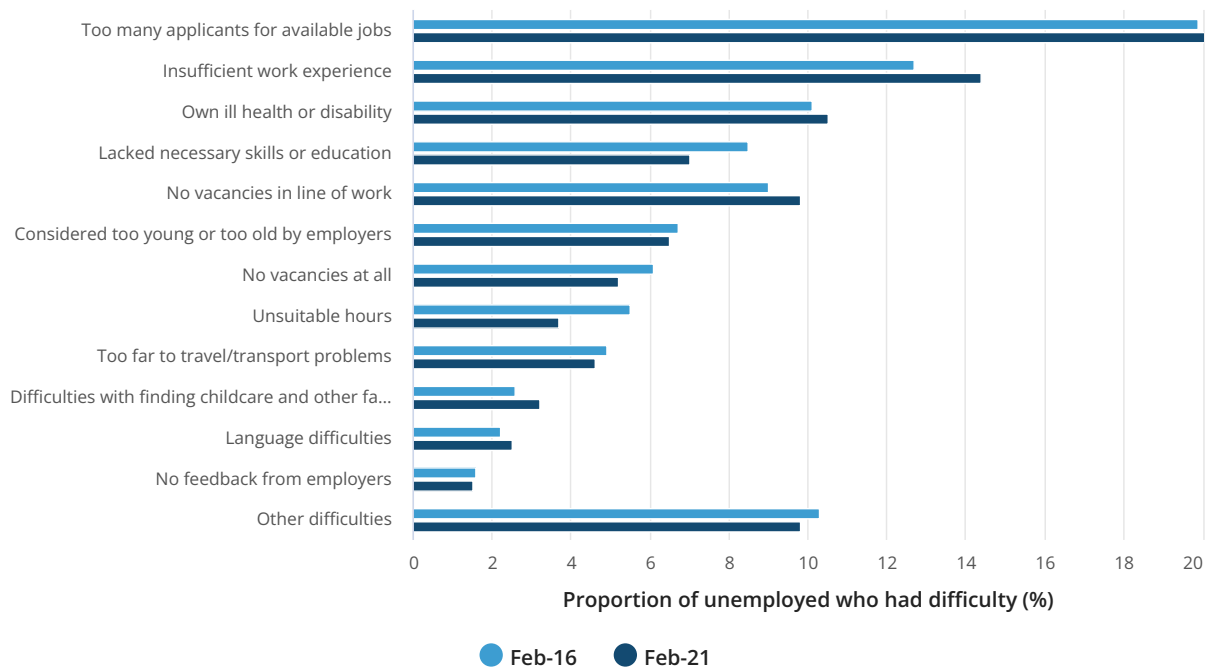
Difficulties finding work

Of the 808,000 unemployed people in February 2021, 88% reported having difficulty finding work.

The main difficulty for job seekers in February 2021 was 'too many applicants for available jobs'.

Reasons for difficulty finding work have changed somewhat in recent years, with an increase since February 2016 in personal factors such as "Insufficient work experience" and "Own ill health or disability", and a decrease in job related factors such as "No vacancies at all" and "Unsuitable hours".

Chart 5: Main difficulty in finding work



People who don't want to work

In February 2021, there were 5.5 million people aged 15 years or over who did not want to work, or were permanently unable to work. The main activities of people who did not want to work were:

- Retired – 2.83 million (59% of people who did not want to work)
- Home duties – 562,000 (12%)
- Attending educational institution – 503,000 (10%)
- Ill health or disability – 316,000 (7%)
- Caring for children – 188,000 (4%)

There were 686,000 people who were permanently unable to work.

Data downloads

Note that the table numbers below are not in sequential order. The numbers relate to the full suite of 22 tables that are published from the [Participation, Job Search and Mobility \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/feb-2021\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/feb-2021) (PJS) survey. These are spread across the three topic based releases: [Job mobility \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/job-mobility/feb-2021\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/job-mobility/feb-2021), Potential workers, and [Underemployed workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/underemployed-workers/feb-2021\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/underemployed-workers/feb-2021). All 22 tables are available from the parent [PJS \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/feb-2021\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/feb-2021) topic page.

Table 1: Potential workers and discouraged job seekers

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[83.7 KB]

Table 8: Characteristics of discouraged job seekers and other potential workers

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[290.89 KB]

Table 9: Duration since last job and main activity of discouraged job seekers and other potential workers

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[165.2 KB]

Table 11: Main reason for not actively looking for work of persons who wanted to work and were available

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[86.57 KB]

Table 12: Job search experience of unemployed persons

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[78.06 KB]

Table 13: Characteristics of successful and unsuccessful job search experience

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[161.55 KB]

Table 15: Main difficulty and duration of job search of unemployed persons

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[121.43 KB]

Table 16: Main difficulty in finding work by age of unemployed persons

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[113.83 KB]

Table 21: Populations by state or territory of usual residence

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[289.02 KB]

All data cubes

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Relative standard errors

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[873.36 KB]

Previous catalogue number

This release uses ABS catalogue number 6228.0*.

Data from this release was previously published in:

- [Participation, Job Search and Mobility, Australia](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia>) (6226.0**), 2015-2020
- [Persons Not In the Labour Force, Underemployed Workers and Job Search Experience, Australia](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/BBB46A2E9C441282CA257DF40079A913?OpenDocument) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/BBB46A2E9C441282CA257DF40079A913?OpenDocument>) (6226.0.55.001), 2014
- [Persons Not In the Labour Force, Australia](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6220.0&viewtitle=Persons%20Not%20in%20the%20Labour%20Force,%20Australia~September%202013~Latest~26/03/2014&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6220.0&issue=September%202013&num=&view=&) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6220.0&viewtitle=Persons%20Not%20in%20the%20Labour%20Force,%20Australia~September%202013~Latest~26/03/2014&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6220.0&issue=September%202013&num=&view=&>) (6220.0), 1975-2013

* Note: Catalogue number 6228.0 was previously used for [Survey of Persons Registered with the CES as Unemployed \(Preliminary\), Mar 1977](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6228.0) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6228.0>).

** Note: Catalogue number 6226.0 was previously used for School Leavers, 1970 to 1974: their Employment Status and Education Experience, May 1975.

Post release changes

6 September 2021:

- Updates to Table 21 - revisions to Population 5: Part-time workers who would prefer full-time hours.

Methodology

[Participation, Job Search and Mobility, Australia methodology, February 2021](#)